

Message Text

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ORIGIN SCI-06

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TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: TGEN, EFIS, MILI, BEXP, VS

SUBJ: MESELSON- BAUGHMAN PAPER

REF: (A) SAIGON 7916; (B) STATE 82846; (C) SAIGON 8577

1. THE DEPARTMENT HAS PROVIDED COPIES OF THE MESELSON-BAUGHMAN PAPER TO THE JAPANESE AND VIETNAMESE EMBASSIES IN WASHINGTON. ADDITIONALLY, COPIES HAVE BEEN POUCHED TO THE SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR TOKYO AND THE COMMERCIAL ATTACHE SAIGON.

2. WITH REFERENCE TO REF. A, PARAGRAPH 4, REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION ON THE EFFECT OF DIOXIN ON HUMANS, THE FOLLOWING IS OFFERED. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS CONSTITUTING THE FAMILY OF DIOXINS. THE DIOXIN RESULTING FROM THE MANUFACTURE OF 2,4,5- T
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KNOWN AS TCDD IS A EXTREMELY TOXIC SUBSTANCE. UNDER LABORATORY CONDITIONS IT HAS PRODUCED THE LETHALITY AND TERATOGENICITY EFFECTS REPORTED IN THE MESELSON PAPER AND SUMMARIZED IN PARAGRAPH 3 OF REF. B. IN THIS CONNECTION IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THERE IS NO DIRECT EVIDENCE OF THE EFFECT OF THIS DIOXIN ON MAN. MUCH EVIDENCE POINTS TO THERE BEING NO EFFECT ON THE GENERAL HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIET NAM OR ON THE HEALTH OF THE CONSUMERS OF SHRIMP. THE SAMPLES USED IN THE MESELSON STUDY WERE TAKEN AT THE TIME OF EXTENSIVE USE OF 2,4,5- T IN INLAND WATERS. AFTER THREE YEARS WITH NO REPORTED ILL EFFECTS TO HUMANS TRACED TO THE DIOXIN AND FOCUSING ON SHRIMP COLLECTED AT SEA, IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE NOTICEABLE HEALTH EFFECTS FROM THE CONSUMPTION OF THE SHRIMP.

3. WITH REFERENCE TO THE REQUEST FOR A STATEMENT FROM MESELSON, WE ARE OF THE OPINION THAT THIS WOULD NOT BE A USEFUL TRACK TO FOLLOW AND THAT MESELSON OR BAUGHMAN WOULD BE UNWILLING TO PROVIDE A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT.

4. WITH REGARD TO THE PROPOSAL THAT SAMPLES BE TESTED, WE ARE EXPLORING A NUMBER OF POSSIBILITIES. TO PERFORM A CONCLUSIVE STUDY ON THE PRESENCE OF THIS DIOXIN IN FISH AND SHELLFISH NEAR SOUTH VIET NAM AND TO DETERMINE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF SUCH IMPURITIES ON MAN WOULD TAKE SEVERAL YEARS. A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENCE OF DIOXIN IN VARIOUS MARINE SPECIES WITHOUT THE STUDY OF THE HEALTH EFFECTS WOULD COST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF \$500,000 AND POSSIBLY TAKE AS LONG AS A YEAR TO COMPLETE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MESELSON MAY BE PERSUADED TO ANALYZE A FEW SAMPLES FROM THE IMPOUNDED SHRIMP. IF NO DIOXIN OR EXTREMELY LOW LEVELS WERE FOUND, IT COULD HELP CLEAR THE CURRENT SITUATION. HOWEVER, IF SOME DIOXIN WERE FOUND AT APPROXIMATELY THE SAME LEVELS REPORTED IN THE MESELSON- BAUGHMAN PAPER, IT WOULD NOT BE CONCLUSIVE OR HELPFUL TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE SHRIMP INDUSTRY. WE WILL ADVISE YOU OF OUR FURTHER CONTACTS ON THE QUESTION OF TESTING SAMPLES.

5. WITH REFERENCE TO REF. C IT MAY BE POINTED OUT TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DR. HO THAT THE DOSAGES OF DIOXIN DISCOVERED BY MESELSON IN SHRIMP WERE APPROXIMATELY 5 PERCENT OF THE LETHAL DOSAGE IN GUINEA PIGS. HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE AS MENTIONED BY DR. HO THAT THIS DIOXIN CAN BE ACCUMULATED AND CONCENTRATED THROUGH THE FOOD CHAIN TO REACH HIGHER LEVELS IN LARGER ANIMALS. AGAIN, WE HAVE NO REPORTED ILL EFFECTS ON HUMANS AND CONCLUSIVE RESEARCH WILL TAKE SEVERAL YEARS.

WE ARE LOOKING INTO THE SUGGESTION THAT A SCIENTIST
VISIT SAIGON IN CONNECTION WITH THE QUESTION OF TESTING
SAMPLES AND WILL REPORT TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. RUSH

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